

Commissioners Present: Marcia Merrill - *Chair*, Gretchen Bailey, Cary Brown, Eileen Boland, Carol Buchdahl, Charlotte Dennett, Laine Dunham, Ruth Finn, Shambulia Gadsden Sams and Jennie Gartner

Commissioners Absent: Cathy Frey, Susie Hudson, Dr. Felicia Kornbluh, Margaret Martin, Anne McClaughry and Marion Milne

Advisors Present: Sandy Bettis representing Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Diane Derby representing Senator Leahy's Office, and Margaret Luce representing Vermont State Nurses Association

Guests: Megan, Don and 7 week old Bryson

Staff: Janet Bullard and Lilly Talbert

Presiding: Marcia Merrill

Recording: Lilly Talbert

Meeting called to order at 9:34 a.m.

Welcome/Introductions/Welcoming New VCW Executive Director

The Commission welcomed Cary Brown as new Executive Director with a standing ovation and cheers. Cary will begin work at the Commission October 24th.

Cary reported on her participation Senator Sanders' Women's Issues Town Meeting in a panel discussion, which took place Thursday, October 4, at 7:00 p.m. at the State House in Room 11. Panelists included Sarah Kenney, VT Network Against Domestic Violence; Dolly Fleming, ED, Mercy Connections; Jill Krowinski, Vermont Legislative Director, Planned Parenthood of Northern New England; Donna Rae Heath, President of VT Business and Professional Women; Rickey Guard Diamond, Editor, Vermont Woman Newspaper; and Tiffany Bluemle, Ex. Director, VT Works for Women. Panelists spoke about the work of their organizations. Audience members spoke about their own experience and what they saw as priorities, including: funding and funding cuts to various programs and support organizations, child care – access to high quality and affordable care, erosion of reproductive rights. Cary spoke about child care worker's low wages and the gap between cost of childcare vs. subsidy rates.

Minutes of September, 2012

Motion made by Carol Buchdahl, seconded by Laine Dunham to approve the minutes of the September 2012 Commission meeting as submitted. Margaret Luce suggested that VLS professor Cheryl Hanna be added to the list of Guests. Carol and Laine accepted the addition as a friendly amendment. The Commission voted to approve the minutes.

Commissioner Introductions

Marcia asked everyone to provide impressions of the Bennington listening forum, if they had attended or any news pertinent to the Commission's work if they had not.

The following are the comments by the Bennington Listening Forum attendees:

- Not surprised by the focus on poverty, including lack of services and specifically transportation issues, but heartened by the optimistic outlook of the girls.
- Carol was thanked for setting the stage for a positive and empowering event.
- The Bennington Maternal Child Health Coalition members were impressed and very thankful. Follow up discussions with the coalition continue and letters to stakeholders and legislators with forum notes and recommendations, as well as a press release will be among the follow up initiatives.
- The youth-focused safe environment of the event was appreciated. Some skepticism that some teens were expressing what they thought adults might want to hear initially was expressed, but once the girls put more thought into their comments, they seemed more able to be more authentic in describing what works/would work best for them as individuals.
- That the topics were not new ones was remarked on, as well as that the lack of media presence added to safety and comfort of teen speakers.
- We need to see more listening forums around the state.
- The forums being conducted by the national WILPF were mentioned. WILPF centered their forums around the question of, "What are real security needs of women?"
- That the young women were thoughtful, brave and honest was mentioned. It was helpful to focus on what works.
- Those who were unable to attend appreciated the notes from the forum.
- It was suggested that we consider ending every forum with "next steps".
- The event was smoothly run but wondered about the perceptions of those young women in attendance who are out of high school and with children vs. those speaking about pressures of getting into college.
- Though unable to attend, experiences in her town with very low income students, young mothers and substance abuse were described.

Other Topics:

Diane Derby spoke about the loss of funding for Department of Justice domestic violence legal defense grants due to federal budget issues. The impact included the loss of a PAVE advocate housed in the Bennington area police department.

Amicus Brief

Gretchen provided an update: This is the first case in federal court interpreting the Vermont state equal pay act. Professor Cheryl Hanna submitted the motion to file to the court on September 21. The Defendants are opposing the amicus brief, which is unusual, but likely to be insignificant. The plan is to file at the end of the month, possibly week of Oct. 22nd. Professor Hanna is in the process of gathering amici. The American Association of University Women of Vermont has agreed to sign on. They are waiting to hear from Vermont Workers' Center, the National Association of Commissions for Women, Vermont Works for Women, Vermont Women's Fund, Vermont Legal Aid, the South Royalton Legal Clinic, National Committee on Pay Equity, the Vermont Human Rights Commission, and the American Association of University Women (National). They have been using this as an opportunity to educate groups

about the Equal Pay Act. Lilly added that Representative Sarah Buxton has been organizing a group of legislators who will be signing on as well this effort. We are pleased that we have been able to use this as a way to raise awareness.

Legislative Luncheon

Janet spoke about plans for the Legislative Luncheon, taking place January 9th, 2013. The day will include a VCW business meeting from 9:30-11:30, with the lunch to follow from 12-1:30. Fundraising will be necessary: each lunch is \$21.00, and with costs for postage and office supplies, the approximate total should be \$3000. Carol added that people give willingly when they understand our work and mission. VCW's Women Education and Research Foundation (VCWERF) will be the fiduciary agent for contributions. Carol, Eileen, Charlotte, Shambulia, Jennie, Sandy and Ruth will be on the lunch program planning committee. They will discuss the program, the report and entertainment/quiz.

Paid Sick Days

Janet spoke updated the Commission on this initiative of the Paid Sick Days Coalition, of which we are a member. This group is preparing to re-introduce H.356 as it was introduced two years ago with one change to allow for usage of combined time off or personal time off (CTO/PTO). Rationale behind this many employers give a combined time off or personal time off package lumping together what we call annual leave, sick leave and personal leave so employers wouldn't have to create a new category of leave.

The legislation proposes to ensure that all workers in Vermont are able to take care of their own health and safety needs and those of their families by allowing employees to accrue a minimum number of paid hours annually so that workers can take paid time from work to address issues related to health care or safety for themselves or a family member.

Incarcerated Women

Janet reported that she attended a Prison Advisory Group meeting recently which included a tour of the facility renovations to date. Recent changes include splitting the gym space in two sections: section 1 for Kids-A-Part office and visit rooms; and section 2 for an (inmate requested) industrial sewing program. There is now increased privacy in the booking unit and a new 6-8 bed infirmary and 4 treatment rooms.

Newly hired Superintendent Bob Arnell plans to institute a leadership model and have staff assigned to Units. The facility has reached capacity with 174 people – largely due to detainees, and especially increased on weekends.

Commissioner of Corrections Andy Pallito has asked the Prison Advisory group to provide him with suggestions and expenses associated with offering both on and off –site training programs with a focus reducing recidivism by November 1st. The Department of Corrections will be holding community input sessions around the state using Vermont Interactive Television with special interest in a dialogue around recidivism with Vermonters.

Other Updates

Janet informed everyone that the Women's Economic Opportunity Conference is scheduled for Saturday, November 10th at Vermont Technical College in Randolph Center. Entrepreneurship Week – Team Vermont will be holding their annual poster contest for high school students again this year and will be offering a YouTube video poster contest as well for the first time. Winners of the poster contest will be announced on Thursday, February 7th, 2013 as part of a full-day of entrepreneurship events in Montpelier. The 4th Annual Central Vermont Career and Job Fair scheduled for Thursday, April 4th, 2013 at the Montpelier Lodge of Elks and Country Club. Green Mountain Girls State is scheduled for Sunday, June 16th – Thursday, June 20th and will most likely be held at Vermont Technical College in Randolph Center.

Meeting adjourned at 11:30.